



## SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

# Fast-spreading Algae Found in Waters Near California Coast

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Scientists in California report the first appearance of a **species** of bright green algae, caulerpa prolifera, growing in the ocean near California. And the researchers say they hope to never see it again.

The growth of caulerpa prolifera was found close to the coast off the Southern California town of Newport Beach. Divers recently began to remove the algae, as it could greatly harm the area's environment. Few fish or other animals eat caulerpa prolifera. So it spreads effectively. It can quickly take control of an ecosystem, forcing out other plants as well as the animals that eat them.

So far, the growth covers about 90-square-meters. However, tiny pieces of the algae can easily break off and continue to grow elsewhere.

Robert Mooney is a biologist with Marine Taxonomic Services. He led a team of three divers at the site.

He told the Associated Press that the team has a chance to fully remove the plant but no time can be wasted.

“We don't have the **luxury** of waiting to see what happens,” he said.

The species was discovered late last year. Federal, state and local officials were urged to act earlier this year to prevent the algae from spreading. It was important to act quickly, they said, because the movement of swimmers and boaters in the sea help spread the algae.

California faced a similar problem two years ago. A related algae was found off the coast of Huntington Beach and Carlsbad. It cost \$7 million to remove. California then banned the sale of that algae and others.

*Caulerpa prolifera* is used in some **aquariums** and is not banned in California. When people clean aquariums, the resulting wastewater can include extremely small pieces of the algae. These pieces will travel along waterways into the Pacific Ocean and begin to reproduce.

The source of Newport Beach's algae invasion is not confirmed. But Keith Merkel, a biological consultant on the project, has a suspicion.

"It's more than likely the source is an aquarium release," he said.

So far, divers have not discovered the algae anywhere else in the area. But, Merkel said testing will continue and if more algae is found, another removal operation will begin.

"There's a good chance that it has spread, we just don't know where — which is the biggest fear that we have," Merkel said.

I'm Jonathan Evans.

*Amy Taxin reported on this story for the Associated Press. Jonathan Evans adapted this story for Learning English. Caty Weaver was the editor.*

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## Words in This Story

**aquarium** – *n.* a glass or plastic container in which fish and other water animals and plants can live

**luxury** – *n.* something desirable but expensive or hard to get

**species** – *n.* a group of animals or plants that are similar and can produce young animals or plants; a group of related animals or plants that is smaller than a genus

